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## **Sen. Brown guides bills to protect essential veterans programs through Senate**

**LANSING** – The Michigan Senate overwhelmingly approved legislation Wednesday to help the children of deceased or disabled veterans attend college while protecting the integrity of a fund intended to provide emergency grants to veterans, said State Sen. Cameron S. Brown, R-Fawn River Township.

“It’s well past time the state reassume its responsibility for the Veterans Tuition Grant Program so the children of our veterans are cared for and so the Veterans Trust Fund is protected,” said Brown, chair of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on State Police and Military Affairs. “With Veteran’s Day approaching, I can think of no more appropriate time to reaffirm our commitment to our state’s heroes.”

The Michigan Veterans Trust Fund has served as an emergency reserve fund for veterans in need of assistance with medical bills, utility costs, taxes and food since 1946. The trust fund allocates grants to veterans from the interest earnings on the original \$50 million allocation and has distributed more than \$89 million in grants.

Meanwhile, the Veterans Tuition Grant Program has provided undergraduate tuition assistance for the children of deceased or disabled veterans since 1935.

The state’s general fund support for the Veterans Tuition Grant Program was withdrawn in the 1960s and the Veterans Trust Fund was forced to assume financial responsibility. Since that time, the \$50 million corpus of the trust fund has been gradually decreased due to the increasing liability of the tuition program.

“The Tuition Grant Program and the Veterans Trust Fund are commitments the state of Michigan made to our nation’s heroes,” Brown said. “It is a disservice to our veterans that one of their programs has been forced to supplement another when both should be the state’s responsibility, not theirs.”

House Bills 4001 and 4002 would shift responsibility for the tuition program from the Trust Fund to the Michigan Higher Education Assistance Authority.

Meanwhile, HB 5091 creates an income tax check off that would allow Michigan taxpayers to contribute \$2 or more to the Michigan Higher Education Assistance Authority for the Children of Veterans Tuition Program. The Children of Veterans Tuition program check off could generate an estimated \$500,000 to \$1 million annually. A similar check off for the Military Family Relief Fund raised \$1.2 million in 2004.

“These bills will give Michigan residents the opportunity to help the children of deceased or disabled veterans attend college,” Brown said. “I am confident the response from Michigan taxpayers will be overwhelming.”

HBs 4001, 4002 and 5091 now return to the House of Representatives for concurrence.

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